

Ochoco Wild and Free Roaming Horse Herd Management Plan Update

Frequently Asked Questions

Updated May 2021

The Ochoco National Forest approved a new herd management plan for the Big Summit Wild Horse Territory on May 7, 2021.

Why did the herd management plan need to be updated?

The last herd management plan was written in 1975 and it prescribed a range of 55 to 65 wild horses on the Big Summit Territory as an appropriate management level. The management plan was created following a 1975 environmental assessment of the wild horses and their territory. Recent surveys estimate at least 135 horses living within and surrounding the territory at any given time. Many of the tools currently available for the management of wild horses were not included in the 1975 plan. The Forest Service conducted an analysis of current conditions and limiting factors for the wild horse territory and updated management plan based on today's conditions, available tools, and latest science.

What has changed in the new plan?

The new plan prescribes an initial range of 47 to 57 wild horses on the Big Summit Territory as an appropriate management level. The Ochoco Land and Resource Management Plan was amended to allow for this range to be adjusted when necessary based on conditions in the Territory. The Forest will conduct gathers to remove excess wild horses to reach the AML and will use fertility control to reduce population growth. The plan also calls for the monitoring and assessment of the genetic health of the herd and collaborating with experts in the field to increase genetic variability.

What will you do with horses that are removed from the Territory?

The new management plan includes Comprehensive Animal Welfare Best Management Practices (BMPs). These outline specific practices such as veterinarian care, feeding and watering, and safe handling and transport.

The goal is for the horses that are removed from the Territory to be adopted. Once they are removed from the Territory, they would be taken to a holding facility and prepared for adoption. Options for this include utilizing an existing interagency agreement with the BLM, providing off-range care at a Forest Service facility, or establishing maintenance and care agreements with private entities.

In the spring of 2021, Discover Your Forest, the non-profit partner of the Ochoco National Forest has begun to convene a community group to assist in the development of a sustainable off-range care and adoption program.

How has the public been involved?

The NEPA process provided for public involvement opportunities. A 30-day scoping period was provided in the summer of 2017 when the Forest Service announced they would undertake this planning process. A 30-day public comment period was then provided for review and comment on the draft Environmental Assessment (EA). Finally, the public was allowed to review and file objections to the draft Decision Notice before and final decision was made. Additionally, the Forest Service worked with COIC in 2015 to host a working group that helped to highlight key issues and information gaps for the Forest Service planners, and then also worked with COIC in 2018 to host a “sound board” group of diverse interests who came together to provide feedback on specific aspects of a wild horse management plan.

Where can I find the herd management plan and related documents?

Link to the planning documents: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=46228>

What are the Forest Service responsibilities for managing wild horses?

The Forest Service is mandated to manage wild horses in accordance with the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971. This Act requires the Secretary of Agriculture to protect unbranded and unclaimed horses residing on public lands, to manage them “as components of the public lands,” and “in a manner that is designed to achieve and maintain a thriving natural ecological balance on the public lands.”

Where can I find more information on the Ochoco wild horses?

Big Summit Wild Horse Territory home page:

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/ochoco/specialplaces/?cid=fseprd488281>

Forest Service Wild Horse and Burro Program: <https://www.fs.fed.us/wild-horse-burro>